



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, May 2 – May 8, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

On 5/4, WS caught and an adult male from the Ninemile pack. Trapping efforts were initiated after a calf was confirmed injured on private land on April 20th. Traps were pulled.

On 5/8, Bradley caught and collared 2 wolves from the Welcome Creek east of Florence. The alpha female was fitted with a GPS collar for a University of Montana research project and a yearling female was collared with a VHF collar. Traps were pulled. Thanks to Craig Jourdonnais who assisted with capture and processing on short notice.

Thanks to Tim Swearingen who volunteered for the wolf program out of Missoula from April 27th - May 6th. Tim did a great job scouting for wolf sign in the Bitterroots east of Florence, the Blue Mountain and Grave Creek area, and the Beavertail area east of Missoula. He's starting a seasonal position next week with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the Red Rock National Wildlife Refuge.

FWP welcomes volunteers Erika Edgley and Charlie Bahnson for this field season. Erika is a graduate student in environmental studies at the University of Montana and will start soon after June 2. Charlie just completed his bachelor's degree in biology in South Dakota. He will start soon after May 25. Also in the field in northwest Montana will be Jonathan Derbridge who is a master's degree candidate in the wildlife program at the University of Montana. He is working in northwest Montana studying wolf diets by measuring stable isotopes of carbon and nitrogen ratios in wolf hair. University of Montana master's student Lindsey Rich will also be in the field working on her project to find more efficient, cost effective wolf population monitoring strategies. Returning technician Kris Boyd will

start at the end of May and work primarily in northwest Montana. The other technician position for western Montana is vacant. FWP expects to advertise the position and hopes to have a qualified candidate on board and in the field in early July.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Flights: Asher flew on 5/1 in southwest Montana.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On 5/3, Wildlife Services confirmed a calf was killed by wolves on private land west of Augusta near Smith Creek. On 5/4, WS confirmed that two calves were killed by wolves in the same area. WS also confirmed a cow as a probable wolf kill in the same area from a separate and previous incident. On 5/5, WS confirmed that another calf was killed by wolves on the same ranch. Also on the 5th, a wolf was killed when seen harassing cattle on the same ranch (see Law Enforcement section below). It is likely that the Benchmark pack is responsible for these losses. Previous losses on this ranch occurred in March and mid-April (when FWP authorized WS to remove 1 wolf from the pack when it was backtracked from dead livestock). Efforts to trap/dart and collar have been ongoing since the original depredation in March and will continue. At least two grizzlies have been frequenting the area making trapping difficult or not possible. FWP authorized WS to remove 2 wolves other than the alpha female who is likely denning. FWP also issued a permit to the livestock owner to assist in lethal control efforts, and it is valid on the ranch only. Lethal control authorization on the permit and WS efforts will continue until a total of 2 wolves are killed.

On 5/4, WS confirmed a calf was killed by wolves on private land in the Bitterroot Valley southwest of Darby. Members of the Trapper Peak pack are likely involved. Another calf was found dead on 4/27 and a single gray wolf was seen at that time but the landowner did not call it in thinking there wasn't enough left of the calf to necropsy. FWP authorized WS to remove 1 wolf other than the alpha female who is likely denning.

Outreach and Education Activities

Nothing to report.

Research Activities

Nothing to report.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On 5/5, a livestock owner shot and killed a wolf on private land under MT law when it was seen in a pasture harassing cattle west of Augusta. This is the same ranch where wolf-livestock conflicts have been ongoing since March (see the Wolf-Livestock section above for additional background information). The incident was reported and investigated by FWP and is considered lawful.

Other

NEW -- Delisting Update:

On May 4, gray wolves in Montana were delisted. Conservation and management are guided by Montana laws, administrative rules (ARM 12.9.1301 – 12.9.1305), and the state's federally-approved plan. Wolves in Montana were automatically reclassified to a "species in need of

management” statewide on May 4. The gray wolf is protected statewide, though individual wolves may be hazed, harassed, or killed if seen actively attacking, killing, or threatening to kill livestock. Incidents must be reported and each will be investigated. Wolves may also be killed to protect human life. See the FWP wolf web page for a Fact Sheet and answers to frequently asked questions about delisting. The FWP wolf web page also has information about state law and regulations and what livestock owners can do to protect livestock. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Background: The Final Rule to Establish a Gray Wolf – Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment and Remove it from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Species becomes effective May 4, 2009. It was published in the *Federal Register* Vol 74, No. 62 pages 15123-15188 on April 2, 2009. The rule, the literature cited, and Questions and Answers about it are posted on the USFWS website at <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

Many environmental groups have already stated their intent to challenge the federal decision in court, by sending the required “60-day Notice of Intent to Sue” letter to Interior Secretary Salazar. Legal challenges are also expected in Wyoming over USFWS rejection of the Wyoming wolf plan and regulatory framework. In all, 5 notices have been sent to the Department of Interior.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season: FWP and the FWP Commission continue efforts to develop and prepare for a potential 2009 season. Previously, the Commission adopted a regulatory framework and season structure for public harvest (e.g. management units, season dates, and other general regulations) of wolves in February 2008. For a potential fall 2008 season, FWP proposed a conservative quota of 75 wolves that was predicted to maintain or increase the population compared to 2007 levels. The injunction precluded consideration or adoption of a final quota and a 2008 hunting season.

The season structure is still in place for a potential fall 2009 season. But FWP and the FWP Commission must still establish a quota (the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters). FWP and the Commission still intend to proceed cautiously and conservatively. The Commission will meet May 14 in Helena to consider a range of tentative quotas. FWP has proposed consideration of a range of options to facilitate significant public comment – all of which are predicted to maintain or increase the wolf population of about 500 wolves (the 2008 estimate). A public comment opportunity will follow any decision made by the Commission decision at its May 14 meeting. Public comments will be accepted through June 19. More information will be available through the Montana Wolf Weekly, including how to comment on any tentative quotas adopted by the Commission.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The Board will meet May 11, 2009 in the Livestock Conference Room 319, Scott Hart Building. The meeting will start at 1pm. The agenda is available from the Program Coordinator – call 444-5609. It can also be found at: <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LLRMP/index.asp>

The Montana Senate has confirmed the appointments of two new Board members (Michael Leahy and John Herman) and the reappointment of three Board members (Brad Radtke, Jim Cross, and Whitney Wankel). The terms of Elaine Allestad (Chairperson) and Larry Trexler continue.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 657-6464 Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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